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Style Studies: Fashioning a Blogger in a Collaborative Design Challenge

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The purpose of this project is to facilitate online learning by providing students with a design challenge that engages them with a preselected fashion blogger on the social media platform, Instagram. There is a growing number of fashion bloggers with their own unique aesthetics that are going straight to Instagram to share their styles (Darwin, 2015). This educational experience capitalizes on the growing number of fashion bloggers on Instagram and students' interest in using social media in the classroom. Social media has transformed the learning process to a highly self-motivated activity making an important contribution to college experiences (Dabbagh and Kitsantas 2012). In this assignment, students follow a selected fashion blogger on Instagram and consider his/her style when developing an apparel design collection. The selected fashion blogger was contacted in advance before the project and agreed to provide students feedback of their finished assignments. In this way, the assignment set out to generate a real world educational experience with someone in the fashion industry to help build critical thinking, illustration, apparel design and trend research skills.

The objective was for students to use the fashion blogger's Instagram posts as inspiration in their design process. Final designs by students were posted online to the course's specified Instagram account, style.studies, and the chosen fashion blogger commented on the designs and suggested revisions. These on demand learning experiences encourage searching and sharing information through digital and networked technologies where learners actively participate rather than passively consume information (Dabbagh and Kitsantas, 2012). This positioned the fashion blogger with an expert opinion and the students and instructor shared in a meaning making process to best represent the fashion blogger's style and needs. Student centered approaches like these focus on learning through collaborative engaged activity in online learning environments. In past research, XXXX (2014) found this type of shared engagement between instructors and students in a fashion design course could contribute to student learning development and strengthen student autonomy. Sykes (2012) also indicated that students from creative disciplines welcome opportunities to work collaboratively online and the majority agree these opportunities add to the success of the creative work.

The assignment took place in a Fashion Drawing I course with a total of 16 students participating. At the beginning of the assignment, students were provided with the specific Instagram account to follow, cvazzana of makingmanhattan.com. Students could follow her, track her outfits and further research her style in relation to future fashion trends. Students used this to identify and create an analysis of the blogger's personal aesthetic based on design principles. This analysis consisted of specific color combinations and usage, favored silhouettes, predictions of favored brands, lifestyle habits and broader psychographics. The students then conducted trend research using WGSN to identify a macro trend for the SP/SU 18 season most suitable to the fashion blogger. They further identified appropriate colors, prints, fabrics, key items and silhouettes from the chosen macro trend. Referencing the Instagram account reminded

the students to develop ideas based on the bloggers personal aesthetic and not solely on what the student would want to wear. This helped encourage students to think outside of their own experience and address the needs of someone else through their design work.

Students were to create a moodboard to represent the future desired trends of the blogger and conjointly included an illustrated five figure composition with corresponding flats for each garment at the end of a five-week period. Throughout the process of the assignment, students were encouraged to discuss ideas with their instructor and peers in a welcoming and open critique. After students discussed the completed assignment during the final critique, digital photos were taken of the student's moodboard and illustrated five figure compositions. These photos were then added to the course Instagram account, style.studies, and each students' personal Instagram account was credited. From start to finish this process of taking photos and posting to Instagram took approximately an hour and half of which was partially done during class time by the instructor. Once all assignments were posted, the fashion blogger was notified to view and make comments on the work. Feedback from the fashion blogger was completed within a day and students started engaging by liking or responding to feedback on Instagram before the next class. The fashion blogger, too, was thrilled and additionally asked if she could repost some of the student work with permission and giving credit to the individual student.

By involving a fashion blogger in the industry, students enthusiastically engaged with the instructor and fellow students to consider the blogger's aesthetic. In this scenario the fashion blogger held the 'expert' opinion of style which placed students with an active role in learning to interpret and respond to someone else's style and aesthetic in a real world setting. There are several advantages of using this activity in apparel design and product development related coursework. This assignment fosters a way of working that incorporates the students natural interest in engaging online. It further presents students with a real world opportunity in which they directly see as beneficial. In return this helped to create an exciting and energetic learning environment for a design studio class. As an instructor, this provided a refreshing and encouraging experience for student learning. While it did take a little planning to coordinate with a fashion blogger ahead of time, the process was simple and straightforward once the project was presented.

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